

ACID RAIN: SOUTHERN UTILITIES IMPACT AND PERSPECTIVE
CHARLESTON, S.C.
OCTOBER 18, 1984

REMARKS OF
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SUBCOMMITTEE ON HEALTH AND THE ENVIRONMENT
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

I WANT TO CONGRATULATE THE SOUTHERN STATES ENERGY BOARD FOR SPONSORING THIS IMPORTANT CONFERENCE. ACID RAIN IS A VITALLY IMPORTANT ISSUE TO OUR COUNTRY AND ESPECIALLY TO THE SOUTH. I AM ESPECIALLY GLAD TO HAVE THE CHANCE TO DISCUSS THIS THREAT TO THE SOUTH'S ECONOMIC LIVELIHOOD AND NATURAL RICHES -- AND THE CONGRESSIONAL RESPONSE -- WITH SUCH AN IMPORTANT GROUP.

WHILE THERE MAY BE DEBATE ABOUT RAINFALL TRENDS IN OTHER REGIONS OF THE COUNTRY, SCIENTISTS AGREE UNIFORMLY THAT RAIN IN THE SOUTH TODAY IS MANY TIMES MORE ACIDIC THAN IT WAS JUST TWENTY-FIVE YEARS AGO. AT THAT TIME, MOST AREAS OF THE SOUTH ENJOYED RAINFALL WITH A PH VERY CLOSE TO THAT OF NATURAL RAIN. SINCE THEN THE SOUTH'S RAPID POPULATION GROWTH AND GROWTH IN ELECTRICITY DEMAND HAS LED TO A DRAMATIC FIVE-FOLD INCREASE IN THE RELEASE OF ACID-FORMING SULFUR DIOXIDE POLLUTION FROM POWER PLANTS. AS A RESULT OF THESE EMISSIONS, AND THE LARGE VOLUMES OF POLLUTION BLOWN INTO THE SOUTH FROM OTHER REGIONS, THE SOUTH'S RAINFALL HAS BECOME TEN TO TWENTY TIMES MORE ACIDIC THAN NATURAL. IN FACT, SCIENTISTS HAVE FOUND THAT SOME ESPECIALLY ACIDIC SOUTHERN RAINS ARE 100 TIMES NATURAL ACIDITY.

INCREASING EVIDENCE INDICATES THAT LAKES AND FORESTS IN VAST AREAS OF THE SOUTH ARE SUFFERING AS A RESULT. EPA SURVEYS HAVE SHOWN THAT LAKES OVER LARGE AREAS OF THE SOUTH ARE LOW IN THE NATURAL MINERALS, SUCH AS LIME, WHICH CAN BUFFER ACIDS; AND ARE THEREFORE VULNERABLE TO ACID RAINS. THIS INCLUDES FULLY 4600 OF FLORIDA'S LAKES, AND MORE THAN 40% OF THE LAKES IN ALABAMA, ARKANSAS AND MISSISSIPPI. RESEARCHERS REPORT THAT FULLY ONE QUARTER OF THE TROUT STREAMS IN WEST VIRGINIA ARE ALREADY ACIDIFYING. FISH KILLS HAVE OCCURRED IN FISHERIES IN NORTH CAROLINA AND SPINAL DEFORMITIES HAVE BEEN DETECTED IN SMALL MOUTH BASS IN GEORGIA. IF WE ARE NOT CAREFUL, LAKES IN THE SOUTH WILL MEET THE FATE OF THE MORE THAN 30,000 ACIDIFIED LAKES IN SWEDEN AND NORWAY WHICH ONCE TEEMED WITH FISH BUT ARE NOW SILENT MONUMENTS TO THE QUIET DEVASTATION OF ACID RAIN.

UNFORTUNATELY, THE DESTRUCTIVE CAPACITY OF ACID RAIN DOES NOT END WITH JUST LAKES. SCIENTISTS HAVE RECENTLY DOCUMENTED A LARGE SCALE FOREST DECLINE OVER MUCH OF THE EASTERN UNITED STATES. THE DAMAGE IS MOST SEVERE IN THE FORESTS OF APPALACHIAN MOUNTAINS WHERE ONCE LUSH MOUNTAINTOPS, SUCH AS NORTH CAROLINA'S MOUNT MITCHELL, ARE NOW NEARLY BARREN AS A RESULT OF THE SUDDEN DEATH OF SPRUCE AND FIR TREES. AND

THE FOREST PROBLEM HAS SPREAD TO COMMERCIALY IMPORTANT TREE SPECIES. FOR EXAMPLE, A RECENT U.S. FOREST SERVICE SURVEY FOUND THAT THE GROWTH OF LOBLOLLY PINE - A VITALLY IMPORTANT SPECIES TO THE ECONOMY OF GEORGIA AND MANY OTHER SOUTHERN STATES - WAS DOWN BY 15 TO 20 PERCENT (AS MEASURED BY WIDTH OF TREE RINGS).

IF THIS TREND CONTINUES THE SOUTH COULD BE AFFLICTED BY AN ECOLOGICAL AND ECONOMIC DISASTER COMPARABLE TO THE ONE WHICH HAS STUNNED WEST GERMANY. GOVERNMENT STUDIES THERE HAVE FOUND THAT FULLY 34% OF WEST GERMAN FORESTS ARE DAMAGED BY AIR POLLUTION, AND THE GOVERNMENT HAS RECENTLY EMBARKED ON A LARGE SCALE ACID RAIN CONTROL PROGRAM, WHILE BEMOANING THE STAGGERING COSTS OF THEIR FAILURE TO ACT MORE QUICKLY. GERMAN FORESTERS HAVE WARNED THAT THE SYMPTOMS WE SEE TODAY IN OUR FORESTS RESEMBLE THOSE OBSERVED FIVE YEARS AGO IN WEST GERMANY.

ENORMOUS ECONOMIC IMPLICATIONS ACCOMPANY SUCH EXTENSIVE DAMAGE. REDUCED FOREST YIELDS WILL HAVE A DIRECT IMPACT OF AMERICA'S \$49 BILLION A YEAR FORESTRY AND FOREST PRODUCTS INDUSTRY, AN INDUSTRY THAT EMPLOYS 1.2 MILLION PEOPLE NATIONWIDE AND IS A CENTERPIECE OF COMMERCE IN MANY SOUTHERN STATES.

NOT SURPRISINGLY, CONCERN HAS SPREAD BEYOND THE SCIENTISTS AND ENVIRONMENTALISTS TO WALL STREET'S INVESTMENT ANALYSTS. IN A RECENT REPORT THE WALL STREET FIRM OF STANDARD AND POORS WARNED THAT ACID RAIN PRESENTS A CLEAR DANGER TO THE FOREST PRODUCTS INDUSTRY AND CAUTIONED THAT "IF ACID RAIN KILLS AN APPRECIABLE NUMBER OF TREES ON THE MILLIONS OF ACRES OWNED BY THE FOREST PRODUCTS COMPANIES, THE COMPANIES' STOCK PRICES WILL DIE FASTER THAN THE TREES."

OF COURSE, THE ECONOMIC COSTS OF FAILING TO TAKE CONTROL ACTION INVOLVES MORE THAN JUST DAMAGES TO FORESTS. IF OUR LAKE ACIDIFICATION PROBLEM NEARS THE SCALE OF THAT AFFLICTING SWEDEN AND NORWAY, OUR NATION'S FISHING, RECREATION AND TOURISM INDUSTRIES WILL SUFFER GREATLY.

MOREOVER, THE POLLUTANTS THAT CAUSE ACID RAIN ARE A PROVEN THREAT TO HUMAN HEALTH, AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTIVITY, AND MAN-MADE MATERIALS. THE HEALTH CONSEQUENCES ARE ESPECIALLY DISTURBING. A RECENT OFFICE OF TECHNOLOGY REPORT ESTIMATES THAT THESE POLLUTANTS MAY BE RESPONSIBLE FOR 50,000 PREMATURE DEATHS PER YEAR IN THE UNITED STATES, ESPECIALLY AMONG PEOPLE WITH RESPIRATORY AND CARDIAC AILMENTS.

THERE IS ABSOLUTELY NO DOUBT THAT ACID RAIN IS A REAL THREAT TO AMERICA'S HEALTH, ECONOMY AND ENVIRONMENT. WHAT'S MORE, THERE IS A CLEAR SCIENTIFIC CONSENSUS THAT SOMETHING MUST BE DONE ABOUT IT.

WHEN OBJECTIVE EXPERT PANELS HAVE BEEN ASSEMBLED TO EVALUATE THE ACID RAIN PROBLEM THEY HAVE IN EVERY CASE SOUNDED DIRE WARNINGS AND UNEQUIVOCALLY RECOMMENDED IMMEDIATE ACTION TO REDUCE THE SULFUR AND NITROGEN OXIDES EMISSIONS THAT CAUSE ACID RAIN. WITHOUT SUCH ACTION, THEY NOTE, WE RISK WIDESPREAD, IRREVERSIBLE DESTRUCTION OF THE ECOSYSTEMS UPON WHICH OUR ECONOMY AND WELL BEING DEPEND.

MORE THAN THREE YEARS AGO AMERICA'S MOST PRESTIGIOUS SCIENTIFIC ORGANIZATION, THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES (NAS), UNDERTOOK A MAJOR STUDY OF THE ACID RAIN PROBLEM. IN 1981 THE NAS UNEQUIVOCALLY RECOMMENDED "PROMPT TIGHTENING OF RESTRICTIONS ON ATMOSPHERIC EMISSIONS," AFTER WARNING THAT "CONTINUED EMISSIONS OF SULFUR AND NITROGEN OXIDES, IN THE FACE OF CLEAR EVIDENCE OF SERIOUS HAZARD TO HUMAN HEALTH AND TO THE BIOSPHERE, WILL BE EXTREMELY RISKY FROM A LONG TERM ECONOMIC STANDPOINT AS WELL AS FROM THE STANDPOINT OF BIOSPHERE PROTECTION."

NUMEROUS STUDIES AND SCIENTIFIC PANELS HAVE SINCE REAFFIRMED THE ACADEMY'S RECOMMENDATIONS. FOR EXAMPLE, IN 1983 PRESIDENT REAGAN'S SCIENCE ADVISOR CONVENED ANOTHER PANEL OF EXPERTS TO INVESTIGATE THE ACID RAIN PROBLEM. THE PRESIDENT'S OWN HAND-PICKED PANEL OF SCIENTISTS AFFIRMED THE NAS'S CALL FOR CONTROL ACTION. BUT THE REAGAN ADMINISTRATION SUPPRESSED THE WHITE HOUSE SCIENCE ADVISOR'S REPORT LAST SPRING, WHILE ACTIVELY OPPOSING CONGRESSIONAL EFFORTS TO ENACT A CONTROL PROGRAM.

THE AMERICAN PEOPLE HAVE READ ABOUT THE WARNINGS FROM OUR SCIENTISTS, AND THEY DO NOT BUY THE REAGAN ADMINISTRATION ARGUMENT THAT WE MUST AWAIT MORE RESEARCH BEFORE TAKING ACTION. POLLSTER LOU HARRIS TESTIFIED BEFORE OUR SUBCOMMITTEE LAST SPRING THAT MORE THAN 70% OF AMERICANS IN ALL REGIONS OF THE COUNTRY FAVOR ACID RAIN CONTROL NOW AND ARE WILLING TO SHARE THE COSTS THROUGH HIGHER ELECTRICITY BILLS. ANOTHER INDICATION OF PUBLIC SUPPORT IS THAT MORE THAN FORTY NATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS, RANGING FROM THE NATIONAL GOVERNOR'S ASSOCIATION, TO THE NATIONAL LEAGUE OF CITIES TO THE SOIL CONSERVATION SOCIETY HAVE CALLED FOR IMMEDIATE ACTION TO CONTROL ACID RAIN.

YET THERE ARE STILL THOSE WHO CLAIM THAT AMERICA CANNOT AFFORD THE COSTS OF TAKING ACTION TO PROTECT OUR RESOURCES. OPPONENTS OF ACID RAIN CONTROL PREDICT REDUCED MINER EMPLOYMENT AND SKYROCKETING UTILITY RATES IN THE MIDWEST--WHERE MUCH OF THE POLLUTION ORIGINATES -- IF CONTROL PROGRAMS ARE ADOPTED.

THEY ARE WRONG. LEGISLATION CAN AND HAS BEEN DRAFTED TO ACHIEVE SIGNIFICANT REDUCTIONS IN ACID POLLUTION WITHOUT CAUSING MIDWESTERN UNEMPLOYMENT OR EXPENSIVE UTILITY RATE INCREASES. ACCORDING TO THE CONGRESSIONAL OFFICE OF TECHNOLOGY ASSESSMENT, A 10 MILLION TON SULFUR DIOXIDE REDUCTION PROGRAM, RELYING UPON POLLUTION CONTROL TECHNOLOGIES THAT WOULD PROTECT THE JOBS OF COAL MINERS BY INSTITUTIONALIZING THE USE OF HIGH SULFUR COALS, COULD BE PAID FOR WITH AN AVERAGE INCREASE IN ELECTRICITY RATES IN THE 48 STATES OF ONLY THREE PERCENT. SCIENTISTS AGREE THAT SUCH A PROGRAM WOULD GREATLY REDUCE THE THREAT TO OUR HEALTH, LAKES AND FORESTS.

THIS LEGISLATIVE PROGRAM IS H.R. 3400, INTRODUCED IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES LAST SPRING BY HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENT SUBCOMMITTEE CHAIRMAN HENRY WAXMAN (D. CALIF.) AND MINNESOTA CONGRESSMAN GERRY SIKORSKI. H.R. 3400 WAS DESIGNED TO PROTECT THE ENVIRONMENT FROM ACID DAMAGE WITHOUT IMPOSING A HEAVY BURDEN ON ANY STATE OR REGION'S ECONOMY, AND WITHOUT PUTTING MINERS OUT OF WORK.

UNDER H.R. 3400 THE 50 DIRTIEST POWER PLANTS WOULD HAVE BEEN REQUIRED TO INSTALL POLLUTION CONTROL DEVICES TO REDUCE DRAMATICALLY THE MANY TONS OF ACID POLLUTION THEY DUMP INTO OUR AIR EACH DAY. BECAUSE IT RELIES UPON POLLUTION CONTROL TECHNOLOGY, RATHER THAN A SHIFT TO LOWER SULFUR COALS TO REDUCE EMISSIONS, THE BILL WOULD BRING SECURITY TO APPALACHIAN MINERS OF HIGH SULFUR COAL.

THE BILL WOULD ALSO HAVE ESTABLISHED A "TRUST FUND" TO PAY 90% OF THE COSTS OF BUILDING THESE POLLUTION CONTROL DEVICES. THE BALANCE OF THE CONSTRUCTION COSTS AND THE COSTS OF OPERATING AND MAINTAINING THE POLLUTION CONTROL EQUIPMENT WOULD BE BORNE BY THE POLLUTING UTILITIES BEING CONTROLLED. THE TRUST FUND WOULD BE SUPPORTED BY A FEE OF 1 MILL PER-KILOWATT HOUR ON ALL NON-NUCLEAR ELECTRICITY GENERATION FROM THE 48 STATES.

THE RATIONALE BEHIND THIS APPROACH IS SIMPLE. ACID RAIN IS A NATIONAL PROBLEM -- THREATING LAKES AND FORESTS IN ALL REGIONS OF THE COUNTRY -- AND IT WARRANTS A NATIONAL SOLUTION. UNDER H.R. 3400 ALL STATES WOULD CONTRIBUTE TO THE VITALLY IMPORTANT CONTROL EFFORT, BUT THOSE MOST RESPONSIBLE WOULD BEAR A LARGER SHARE OF THE COSTS.

THE RESULT WAS AN EFFECTIVE PROGRAM AFFORDABLE TO EVERY STATE. AS I MENTIONED EARLIER, AFTER DETAILED STUDY THE CONGRESSIONAL OFFICE OF TECHNOLOGY ASSESSMENT PROJECTED THAT THE AVERAGE ELECTRICITY CONSUMER WOULD FACE A RATE INCREASE OF LESS THAN THREE PERCENT. EVEN IN THE MOST HEAVILY POLLUTING STATE, OHIO, WHERE DEMANDS FOR CONTROL WOULD BE GREATEST, ELECTRICITY COSTS WOULD INCREASE ONLY 6 PERCENT; ROUGHLY HALF OF THE COSTS WHICH RATE PAYERS WOULD BEAR IF OHIO WERE TO CLEAN UP ITS AIR WITHOUT THE HELP OF A TRUST FUND.

H.R. 3400 WAS A PRACTICAL AND POLITICALLY REALISTIC BILL BUT, AS MANY OF YOU KNOW, THE BILL WAS DEFEATED LAST MAY BY A 10 TO 9 VOTE IN OUR SUBCOMMITTEE ON HEALTH AND THE ENVIRONMENT.

THIS OUTCOME WAS ESPECIALLY DISAPPOINTING BECAUSE THE BILL LOST FOR WANT OF THE SUPPORT OF THE STATE FOR WHOM IT DID THE MOST -- OHIO. MORE THAN 130 FORWARD-LOOKING REPRESENTATIVES FROM ALL OVER THE NATION HAD AGREED TO AN APPROACH WHICH OFFERED BILLIONS OF DOLLARS TO EASE THE COST OF CLEAN-UP -- INCLUDING MORE THAN 4 BILLION TO OHIO ALONE. BUT IT WAS OHIO CONGRESSMEN THAT PROVIDED THE CRUCIAL VOTES TO ELIMINATE ACID RAIN CONTROL FROM OUR PROPOSED CLEAN AIR ACT AT OUR SUBCOMMITTEE MARK-UP.

WELL THAT WAS LAST YEAR IN THE HOUSE. WHERE WILL CONGRESS TURN NEXT YEAR?

LOOKING FIRST TO THE SENATE: LAST YEAR THE SENATE ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC WORKS COMMITTEE REPORTED OUT AN ACID RAIN CONTROL BILL MANDATING A 10 MILLION TON REDUCTION IN SULFUR DIOXIDE EMISSIONS FROM THE 31 STATES EAST OF OR BORDERING ON THE MISSISSIPPI RIVER. IT IS A GOOD BET THAT THE SENATE COMMITTEE -- WHICH INCLUDES SEVERAL NEW ENGLAND AND SEVERAL WESTERN SENATORS AMONG ITS MEMBERS AND ONLY ONE MIDWESTERN SENATOR -- WILL REPORT AN ACID RAIN CONTROL PROGRAM AGAIN NEXT YEAR.

IT IS ALSO A GOOD BET THAT THE SENATE COMMITTEE WILL HAVE TO SHIFT THEIR APPROACH IF WE ARE TO SEE PASSAGE OF A BILL IN THE FULL SENATE. THE 31 STATE APPROACH ADOPTED BY THE COMMITTEE IN PAST YEARS WOULD BRING A WINDFALL OF LOW SULFUR COAL SALES TO THE STATES OF WESTERN SENATORS ON THE COMMITTEE AND PROVIDE CHEAP ACID RAIN PROTECTION TO THE NEW ENGLANDERS. THE MIDWEST, WHICH IS NOT REPRESENTED ON THE COMMITTEE, BEARS THE BRUNT OF CONTROL COSTS. MOREOVER, BECAUSE THE BILL RELIES UPON UTILITY SHIFTS FROM MIDWESTERN HIGH SULFUR COALS TO WESTERN LOWER SULFUR COALS, THE MIDWEST WOULD ALSO HAVE TO ENDURE THE LIKELY JOB LOSSES FOR THEIR MINERS. THIS APPROACH MAY BE AN EASY WAY OUT FOR THE COMMITTEE. BUT IT WILL FIND SAILING MUCH ROUGHER IN THE FULL SENATE WHERE THE HIGH COSTS TO THE MIDWEST, AND THE CONCERNS OF MIDWESTERN SENATORS, WILL HAVE TO BE DEALT WITH.

LOOKING, ONCE AGAIN, AT THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES. WE HAVE, AS I'VE EXPLAINED, WORKED TO DEVELOP AN APPROACH THAT IS ACCEPTABLE TO ALL REGIONS OF THE COUNTRY. OUR SUBCOMMITTEE INCLUDES SEVERAL MEMBERS FROM THE MIDWEST, AS WELL AS THE SOUTH, THE WEST AND NEW ENGLAND. THIS MEANS THAT WHATEVER LEGISLATION WE CAN REPORT OUT OF COMMITTEE STANDS A COMPARATIVELY GOOD CHANCE OF PASSING THE FULL HOUSE.

BUT H.R. 3400 WAS DEFEATED IN OUR SUBCOMMITTEE LAST YEAR. WHERE WILL WE TURN NOW? SUBCOMMITTEE CHAIRMAN WAXMAN'S MOST CRUCIAL OBJECTIVE REMAINS PROMPT AND EFFECTIVE CONTROL OF ACID RAIN -- BECAUSE OUR HEALTH, OUR LAKES AND OUR FORESTS WILL BE SUFFER IMMEASURABLY IF WE ALLOW THE ACID ASSAULT TO CONTINUE UNABATED. I CANNOT YET SAY THAT WE WILL STAY WITH THE TRUST FUND APPROACH IN H.R. 3400. OHIO'S POSITION HAS FUELED THE EFFORTS OF THOSE WHO FAVOR ACID RAIN CONTROL BUT ARE UNWILLING TO SHARE IN THE COSTS. IF IT IS NECESSARY TO ABANDON THE TRUST-FUND TO MAKE ACID RAIN CONTROL A REALITY, WE MAY.

IN ANY CASE YOU CAN REST ASSURED THAT WHATEVER PROGRAM THE SUBCOMMITTEE TURNS TO WILL BE FAIR TO THE SOUTH. WE WOULD WELCOME COMMENTS FROM ANY OF YOU AS TO HOW THIS COULD BE BEST ACHIEVED.

MR. WAXMAN'S KEY CONCERN IS THAT WE NOT ALLOW THE CHORUS OF WARNINGS FROM OUR LEADING SCIENTISTS TO GO UNHEEDED. PRESIDENT REAGAN'S KNEE-JERK OPPOSITION TO ACID RAIN CONTROL IGNORES THE THOROUGHNESS OF ACID RAIN RESEARCH AND REFLECTS AN IDEOLOGY THAT EQUATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION WITH BAD ECONOMICS. HIS RELUCTANCE TO ACT IS CAUSING HUMAN SUFFERING AND COSTING OUR ECONOMY BILLIONS OF DOLLARS.

WE CANNOT AFFORD THIS POLICY OF IGNORANCE. WE ARE WASTING PRECIOUS TIME.